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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XX

OCTOBER, 1902

NUMBER 4

THE BIBLE AND THE COMMON SCHOOLS.

THE fact that the Bible is generally excluded from the public schools of the United States, where formerly it was used as a book of devotion and instruction, is not to be attributed to a growing disregard for religion, or for the most profoundly religious literature of the world—the Hebrew Scriptures. This situation has been created by the friends of the Bible rather than by its enemies; for if the friends of the Bible could have agreed among themselves as to how the Bible should be taught in the schools, their influence would have secured the continuance of such instruction. But it came to pass that the Bible was used in the schools, not only for general religious and ethical instruction, but also for the inculcation of sectarian and theological ideas. Protestant teachers taught the Bible in a way which antagonized the Roman Catholics; and teachers of the several Protestant denominations interpreted the Bible to the children from their own point of view. But the public money which is raised by general taxation for the support of the common schools comes from men of widely differing ecclesiastical creeds and connections, and cannot therefore be used for the dissemination of sectarian tenets. So by a gradual process the state laws have come to forbid biblical instruction, or even a devotional use of the Bible, in the common schools.

The losses which have resulted are serious indeed. Religion and morality are primary features in a true education. The development of right ideas of duty and of conduct—in other

words, character-making—is the supreme end of school instruction. This principle had been recognized, and the Bible had been used in the schools as the chief means of teaching religion and morality. When Bible instruction was no longer permitted, the primary instrument of character-building was laid aside. Instruction in religion was discontinued, and instruction in morals was reduced to a minimum. In this way two of the chief elements of education were severed from the general curriculum of education. The home and Sunday school could impart such instruction in a measure; but since only a limited number of children attend Sunday school, or live in homes where real religion and morality are found, it has resulted that the great majority of children have been growing up without essential religious and ethical education. They have lacked those elements of character-building which alone can make them complete men and women. As they have received their education without the proper religious or moral constituents, they look upon religion and morality as incidental matters which do not directly concern them.

It is also a genuine loss, though by no means to be compared with that just described, that the exclusion of the Bible from the public schools has brought in a widespread ignorance concerning the facts of biblical history and the phraseology of the English versions. It is no doubt true that the young people of the present generation are less able to identify, or even to recognize, quotations from and allusions to the Bible in English literature. It is equally true that they do not themselves quote or allude to the Bible as was customary fifty years ago. The exclusion of the Bible from the public schools, while it is not the only cause—and probably not the primary cause—is, at least, one cause of the present mode.

It is from this latter point of view that some important utterances (see below, pp. 303–5) have recently been made calling for the restoration of the Bible to the schools *as literature*; that is, it is asked that the Bible be used, not for instruction in religion and morality, but as a means of literary culture. Now, it is certainly desirable that the

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young people of America should be able to recognize biblical quotations and allusions in the masterpieces of English literature; and it is still more desirable that they should appreciate and imbibe the surpassing literary qualities of the biblical writings. Without these attainments their culture would no doubt be deficient.

Still, culture is not the chief end of man, nor the primary function of the Bible. The biblical books are indeed masterpieces of literature, even in an English translation; but they have a much more important service to render to the world. The Bible is first of all for religious and moral instruction; historically this was its origin, and practically this is its great mission. It is a monument of the far-distant past; but it is not simply a relic, for it has a real life in the present. Rightly interpreted, it is a guide-book to our own religion and morality, and is the best medium for instruction in these most important elements of our lives.

If, then, the Bible should be restored to the schools for the purpose of culture, to broaden the literary intelligence and susceptibility of the children, it would be able to render a minor service which is needed; but *THE BIBLE A BOOK OF RELIGION AND MORALS* would be forbidden to render that higher service to which it was destined. Happily, the study of the Bible as literature would of necessity involve an infiltration of its religious ideas and moral principles into the minds of the pupils, and so the primary purpose of the Bible would be in part accomplished by indirection. But is it not desirable that the Bible should pass for what it is—a book of religion and morals? If it is to be restored to the common schools, should it not be restored as a book of religion and morals? Only so can the essential defect in present education be removed. The children could do much better without the culture and literary intelligence than without the religious and moral instruction which they at present lack.

Then why not both? To be sure, let us have both literary culture and religio-ethical instruction through the Bible. But let us not become confused by supposing that we have the latter

when we have the former, or obscure the issue by talking about the one thing when we mean the other. And certainly our first and best endeavor should be that the Bible may perform its primary mission of morals and religion. Is this primary mission being adequately performed through the Sunday school and home? It has been so assumed, but each passing year shows more clearly that this is not the case. Further, there is a growing judgment of Christian people that adequate instruction in religion and morality cannot be given in the Sunday school and home alone. The home no longer feels the necessary responsibility, and the Sunday school has neither the time nor the instrumentalities for adequate instruction. And, in addition, the divorcement of religious from secular education destroys the vital relation between the two.

Therefore, it seems certain that the ideal of education, as well as the only adequate method of education, is to establish religious and moral instruction in the common schools. This will call for the restoration of the Bible to the schools as the best medium of such instruction. And we shall then find ourselves once more in accord with the status of instruction in England and Germany. But can we now use the Bible for this purpose when not long ago it was found impracticable, and was discontinued? Can we now teach religion and morals by means of the Bible without at the same time teaching sectarian ideas? The Bible is not sectarian; Roman Catholics and all Protestant denominations equally claim it. The formal creeds and the systems of government and worship which have grown up in the centuries of Christian history are post-biblical; they are a superstructure, built upon the fundamentals of Christianity as recorded in the Bible. Can we get beneath ecclesiastical formulations, regulations, and liturgies to a fundamental religious belief and moral practice upon which all Christians can agree, and which they can unite to promote? Or must the Christian sects still strive with each other to the detriment of their cause? Must the Bible continue to be excluded from the common schools

because differing theological interpretations, modes of church organization, and manner of religious worship still divide the hosts of the Lord, and the several camps are still jealous of one another?

We believe that sectarianism is fast disappearing, that an era of unity in essentials is near at hand. Then Christianity will receive a better recognition, and rapid growth will follow. We believe also that the Bible can now be taught much more correctly and effectively than a generation ago; that many of the former difficulties with using it as a handbook of religion and morals have been removed. But if the Bible were again to be taught in the schools *as it was formerly taught*, the same objections would arise. In order to restore the Bible to the schools it must be taught in the right way—the way which accords with the best modern knowledge of the Bible, the best modern science of religious and ethical teaching, and the best Christian spirit which recognizes true Christianity wherever it exists, and is able to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. When we can secure for our public schools a corps of teachers trained to teach the Bible in this right way, there should be no delay in restoring the Bible to the schools.